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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: UNRESOLVED ISSUES REMAIN AFTER FATAH COUNCIL
ENDORSES APRIL 15 FOR SIXTH PARTY CONGRESS

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. The Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) announced on February 19 its recommendation that the sixth party Congress be held April 15 in Jordan or Egypt. In February 18-19 conversations with PolSpecialist, grassroots activists doubted that the Congress would be held as soon as April 15, since the FRC referred all the tough decisions to the Fatah Central Committee (FCC). They believe that the FCC will not take any decisions that diminish the current leadership's power. Full text of FRC communique (which does not mention the FRC's recommendation to hold the Congress in either Jordan or Egypt, but rather makes an oblique reference to "the most suitable venue.") at para 9. End Summary.

FRC Sets Date for Sixth Party Congress... Again.

¶2. (C) FRC member Adnan Samara (an ally of "Old Guard" members of the FCC) described the February 16-17 FRC meeting to PolSpec as a "success," saying that members had endorsed all preparatory committee recommendations (including an April 15 Congress date), referring any open questions and the final delegate list to the FCC. He said the two remaining obstacles to the Congress are obtaining Egyptian or Jordanian approval to host the Congress, and Hamas concurrence for delegates from Gaza to travel to the Congress. Samara said if Egypt or Jordan do not agree to host the congress, the venue for the Congress could reemerge as a point of contention.

¶3. (C) FRC member Jibril Rijoub told PolSpec that momentum toward the congress is building, but that he is skeptical about April 15 as a start date. He said the FRC agreed to appoint all of the 1,330 delegates to the Congress, but grassroots leaders will probably block this decision. Rijoub said key differences over the venue have been "swept under the rug," reflecting Abu Mazen's inability to exert his will on this issue.

¶4. (C) FRC member Mohammad al-Madani told PolSpec that, on the margins of the FRC, senior FCC and FRC members discussed several plans to stall the Congress. (Note: Al-Madani sees himself as a go-between of "Young Guard" and "Old Guard" interests in the preparations for the Congress. Before a falling out over unrelated issues, he was closely aligned with Ahmad Qurei (Abu Ala'a). End Note.) Possible alternatives discussed were: 1) a small membership conference of 400-500 members to elect an interim, temporary FCC; 2) appointing seven new members to the FCC and filling in FRC vacancies; and 3) a large emergency committee to include FCC and FRC members and selected grassroots leaders to work on the sixth congress.

¶5. (C) FRC members described a planned attendance of 1,330 Fatah members, including:

-- All FCC and FRC members;

-- 600 delegates representing the West Bank, including 11 members from each of 11 districts in the West Bank;

-- 400 delegates from Gaza;

-- 300 delegates from the diaspora; and

-- No more than 250-300 Fatah-affiliated security officers of BG rank or higher, distributed among the geographic districts.

Grassroots Unhappy About Delegation Composition

¶6. (C) West Bank grassroots activist Qadora Faris told PolSpec that the FCC is not yet serious about holding the Congress and that "I'll believe it when I see it." The preparatory committee and FRC are trying to "kill" the prospects of a Congress now by recommending it be held abroad, he said. He added that none of the key differences within Fatah have been resolved and that many within it continue to work to derail the congress. Faris said grassroots leaders in the West Bank and Gaza have failed to build pressure sufficient on the FCC to "surrender."

¶7. (C) Jamal al-Dik, a Fatah official at the office of mobilization and discipline, told PolSpec that the FRC endorsement of a Congress abroad ignored a key demand of West Bank activists. Al-Dik said some "conspiracy theorists" believe that Abu Mazen will quietly ask the Jordanians and Egyptians not to host the congress in order to ensure that it

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is held in the West Bank, minimizing the risk of outside influences. Al-Dik said Fatah leaders outside the West Bank, including Faruq Qadomi, Hani al-Hassan, and Mohammad Jihad, will oppose the Congress if it is not held abroad.

Comment

¶8. (C) Significant gaps within Fatah remain, despite the effort to put a positive spin on the outcome of the FRC meeting. Abu Mazen has been firm in insisting that the Congress be held in the West Bank and is unlikely to accept holding it in Egypt or Jordan, as the FRC recommended. If, as expected, neither Egypt nor Jordan agree to host the Congress, the discussion returns to square one.

¶9. (C) Underlying the squabbling about venue and participation is the key question of the future leadership of Fatah. If the Congress is held, will it elect a new reform minded Central Committee? Or, will the Old Guard continue to dominate the movement? Will Abu Mazen exercise his authority to make the necessary changes in the leadership, or will he allow internal divisions to continue? The most recent FRC meeting provided no answers to these questions. End Comment.

FRC Communique

¶10. (U) ConGen translation of the communique issued at the conclusion of the FRC meeting follows.

Begin Text.

The Fatah Revolutionary Council affirmed at the conclusion of its 36th term held in Ramallah (February 16-18) on Fatah's full and unconditional readiness to exert efforts towards the success of the national dialogue without any delay.

FRC concluding statement and relevant Sixth Congress decision

The Council discussed the following agenda items:

- 1) The barbaric Israeli aggression on the Gaza strip;
- 2) The national dialogue to restore unity of the homeland;
- 3) The peace process and negotiations;
- 4) The sixth congress and the decisions of the preparatory committee;

First: greetings to the steadfast people in the Gaza Strip in the face of the Israeli aggression and siege

Fatah Revolutionary Council salutes the great steadfast people in the Gaza Strip, and all men and factions who confronted the Israeli aggression, emphasizing their sacrifices and courage throughout 22 days of Israeli aggression by planes, tanks and rockets. Our people will not give up to the Israeli aggressors but will continue their steadfastness and courage until expelling the occupation and uprooting the settlements and ending the siege on the Gaza Strip and opening the crossings and releasing the Palestinian prisoners and detainees and the establishment of the independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Second: Israel must be condemned and the Israeli officials must be tried in front of an international war crimes tribunal

The Fatah Revolutionary Council strongly condemns the Israeli aggressors who deliberately killed civilian women and children and the planes and tanks which destroyed homes over the heads of inhabitants and terrorized children and killed their families. The Council calls on all Palestinian, Arab, and international human rights organizations and legal experts to call on the international war crimes tribunal to try the Israeli officials for the holocaust they committed in Gaza Strip in front of the entire world. The international silence in front of this Israeli crime and the barbaric siege that continues against 1.5 million Palestinian citizens in the Gaza Strip will only lead to destruction of any hope for peace, security and stability in the entire Middle East region and the blood of our people will not go wasted and Israel will not enjoy peace and security if it keeps denying the rights of our people and if it continues to use the language of force and barbarism in addressing our people.

The UN Security Council, which is responsible for security and stability at the international level, is called to assume

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its responsibilities. The Middle East today is boiling with anger and rage against Israeli barbarism against our innocent and peaceful people, who only want to see the end of occupation, settlements, and who want to build their national independence in their independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Third: Success of the national dialogue and regaining unity is the required national response to the Israeli barbarism

The Fatah Revolutionary Council salutes the efforts of Egypt towards ending the internal split, especially that the Israeli enemy and occupier and aggressor is the sole beneficiary from the split. The Israeli aggression against our people in the Gaza Strip is proof that the current split between the two sectors of the homeland is an excuse for Israel to continue killing our people and to continue striking the national steadfastness and capacity to resist and struggle towards expelling the occupation and uprooting the settlements.

On this basis, the Fatah Revolutionary Council confirms to our people in Gaza that Fatah expresses full, permanent, and unconditional readiness to make the national dialogue succeed immediately and without any delay. Unity and legitimacy are the power of our people and can work to take away from Israel its false and weak justifications for the aggression and the

continuation of the siege and the construction of settlements and the Judaization of Jerusalem.

The issues of disagreement among the Palestinian factions and forces must be resolved and we must not continue on the path of the internal split that proved to everyone its harm since Israel uses the split to destroy the national future. The Council praised the decision of the President and the Fatah Central Committee to stop the media campaigns and the others measures that aim to prepare the internal climate towards the success of the national dialogue.

Fourth: No negotiations with Israel in light of settlements and barbaric aggression against our people

The Council affirms that the Fatah Movement will not accept any longer holding any negotiations with the government of Israel unless it halts settlement activities and its apartheid wall on our occupied Palestinian lands; the Council stresses that negotiations with Israel will not be of any use to our people while Israel continues to commit barbaric massacres and kill women and children and destroy entire residential quarters.

Therefore, we affirm that bilateral negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides have not achieved any progress at any level and there was no Israeli seriousness at all but all they did were maneuvers to gain time towards building more settlements on the Palestinian lands. President Abu Mazen announced that negotiations cannot achieve any result unless Israel halts settlements in Jerusalem and in all Palestinian lands.

In light of the dangerous situation and the aggression and siege and settlements, the Fatah Revolutionary Council believes in holding an international peace conference as soon as possible to force Israel to withdraw from all Palestinian and Arab occupied territories and recognize our national rights and release the Palestinian prisoners and solve the issue of the refugees right of return in accordance with Resolution 194.

Fifth: Decision to hold Fatah Sixth General Conference

The Fatah Revolutionary Council affirmed on the inevitability of holding the Fatah sixth congress; the Council ratified the decisions of the preparatory committee and commissioned the Central Committee to conduct the necessary contacts towards selecting the most suitable venue to hold the congress no later than April 15, 2009.

End Text.

WALLES